

*Armstrong*

FROM THE *x*  
*x* BEGINNING

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# FROM THE BEGINNING



Reprinted from articles by  
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and  
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HAMPTON INSTITUTE."



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## FROM THE BEGINNING.

IT meant something to the Hampton School, and perhaps to the ex-slaves of America, that, from 1820 to 1860, the distinctively missionary period, there was worked out in the Hawaiian Islands, the problem of the emancipation, enfranchisement and Christian civilization of a dark-skinned Polynesian people in many respects like the Negro race.

From 1831 my parents, Richard Armstrong of Pennsylvania and Clarissa Chapman of Massachusetts, were missionaries, till my father's appointment, in 1847, as Minister of Public Instruction, when he took charge of, and in part built up, the five hundred Hawaiian free schools and some of the higher educational work, until his death in 1860.

Born there in 1839, and leaving the country in 1860 to complete my education under Dr. Mark Hopkins at Williams College, Mass., I had distinct impressions of the people, of the work for them and its results. Let me say here, that whatever good teaching I may have done has been Mark Hopkins teaching through me.

On horseback and canoe tours with my father and alone, around those grandly picturesque volcanic islands, inspecting schools and living much among the natives (then generally Christianized) I noticed how easily the

children learned from books, how universally the people attended church and had family prayers; were always charmingly hospitable, and yet lived pretty much in the old ways; all in one room, including the stranger within their gates, who usually had, however, the benefit of the raised end and a curtain. They seemed to have accepted, but not to have fully adopted, Christianity; for they did not have the conditions of living which make high standards of morality possible.

While far above the plane of heathenism, most of its low and cruel practices having disappeared, and while they were simple and sincere believers, contributing of their substance to the churches more, in proportion, than any American community of which I now know, they could not, under the circumstances, keep up to a high level of conduct; the "old man" in them had pretty much his own way. They were like the people to whom the epistles of the New Testament were written; they were grown up children.

To preach the Gospel rather than to organize living was the missionary idea. Devoted women visited the houses, and practical morality was thundered from the pulpit. "Let him that stole steal no more," or the like, was the daily precept, followed by severe church discipline; but houses without partitions, and easy-going tropical ways, after generations of licentious life, made virtue scarce. They were not hypocrites, and, from their starting point, had made a great advance. "Our saints are about

up to your respectable sinners," said a returned missionary.

Illustrating two lines of educational work among them were two institutions: the Lahaina-luna (government) Seminary for young men, where, with manual labor, mathematics and other higher branches were taught; and the Hilo Boarding and Manual Labor (missionary) School for boys, on a simpler basis, under the devoted David B. Lyman and his wife. As a rule, the former turned out more brilliant, the latter less advanced but more solid men.

In making the plan of the Hampton Institute, that of the Hilo School seemed the best to follow. Mr. Lyman's boys had become among the best teachers and workers for their people; while graduates of the higher school, though many had done nobly at home and in foreign fields, had frequently been disappointing.

Hence came our policy of teaching only English and our system of industrial training at Hampton. Its graduates are not only to be good teachers, but skilled workers, able to build homes and earn a living for themselves and encourage others to do the same.

Two and a half years' service with the Negro soldiers (after a year as Captain and Major in the 125th New York Volunteers) as Lieutenant-Colonel and Colonel of the Ninth and Eighth Regiments of U. S. Colored Troops, convinced me of the excellent qualities and capacities of the freedmen. Their quick response to good treatment and to discipline was a constant surprise. Their tidiness,



devotion to their duty and their leaders, their dash and daring in battle, and ambition to improve—often studying their spelling books under fire—showed that slavery was a false, though doubtless for the time being, an educative condition, and that they deserved as good a chance as any people.

In March 1866, I was placed by General O. O. Howard, Commissioner of the Freedmen's Bureau, in charge of ten counties in Eastern Virginia, with headquarters at Hampton, the great "contraband" camp, to manage Negro affairs and adjust, if possible, the relation of the races.

Colored squatters by thousands and General Lee's disbanded soldiers returning to their families, came together in my district on hundreds of "abandoned" farms which government had seized and allowed the freedmen to occupy. There was irritation, but both classes were ready to do the fair thing. It was about a two years' task to settle matters by making terms with the land owners, who employed many laborers on their restored homes. Swarms went back on passes to the "old plantations" with thirty days' rations, and nearly a thousand were placed in families in Massachusetts as servants, through the agency of a Home in Cambridgeport, under charge of a committee of Boston ladies.

Hardest of all was to settle the ration question; about two thousand, having been fed for years, were demoralized and seemed hopeless. Notice was given that in three months, on October 1, 1866, all rations would be stopped,



except to those in hospital, for whom full provision was made. Trouble was expected, but there was not a ripple of it, or a complaint, that day. Their resource was surprising; the Negro in a tight place is a genius.

It was my duty, every three months, to personally visit and report upon the condition of the ten counties; to inspect the Bureau office in each, in charge of an army officer; to investigate troubles and to study the relations of the races. The better class of whites were well disposed, but inactive in suppressing any misconduct of the lower class. Friendliness between the races was general, broken only by political excitement, and was due, I think, to the fact that they had been brought up together, often in the most intimate way, from childhood; a surprise to me, for, on missionary ground, parents, with the spirit of martyrs, take every pains to prevent contact of their children with the natives around them.

Martial law prevailed; there were no civil courts, and for many months the Bureau officer in each county acted on all kinds of cases, gaining generally the confidence of both races. When martial law was over the Military Court at Hampton was kept up by common consent for about six months.

Scattered families were reunited. Even from Louisiana—for the whole South was mapped out, each county officered, and as a rule, wisely administered—would come inquiries about the relatives and friends of those who had been sold to traders years before; and great justice and

humanity were shown in bringing together broken households.

General Howard and the Freedmen's Bureau did for the ex-slaves, from 1865 to 1870, a marvelous work, for which due credit has not been given; among other things, granting three and a half millions of dollars for school houses, salaries, etc., thereby giving an impulse and foundation to the education of about a million colored children. The principal Negro educational institutions of to-day, then starting, were liberally aided at a time of vital need. Hampton received over \$50,000 through General Howard for buildings and improvements.

On relieving my predecessor, Capt C. B. Wilder of Boston, at the Hampton headquarters, I found an active, excellent educational work going on under the American Missionary Association of New York. This society in 1862, had opened in the vicinity, the first school for freedmen in the South, in charge of an ex-slave, Mrs. Mary Peake. Over fifteen hundred children were gathered daily; some in old hospital barracks—for here was Camp Hamilton, the base hospital of the Army of the James, where, during the war, thousands of sick and wounded soldiers had been cared for, and now where over six thousand lie buried in a beautiful National Cemetery. The largest class was held in the "Butler School" building, since replaced by the "John G. Whittier School-house."

Close at hand, the pioneer settlers of America and the first slaves landed on this continent; here Powhatan

reigned; here the Indian was first met; here the first Indian child was baptized; here freedom was first given the slaves by Gen. Butler's famous "contraband" order; in sight of this shore the battle of the "Monitor" and "Merrimac" saved the Union and revolutionized naval warfare; here General Grant based the operations of his final campaign. The place was easily accessible by railroad and water routes to the North, and to a population of two millions of Negroes; the centre of prospective great commercial and maritime development—of which Newport News, soon to have the largest and finest ship yard in the world, is beginning the grand fulfilment—and, withal, a place most healthful and beautiful for situation.

I soon felt the fitness of this historic and strategic spot for a permanent and great educational work. The suggestion was cordially received by the American Missionary Association, which authorized the purchase, in June, 1867, of "Little Scotland," an estate of 125 acres on Hampton River, looking out over Hampton Roads. Not expecting to have charge, but only to help, I was surprised, one day, by a letter from secretary E. P. Smith, of the A. M. A., stating that the man selected for the place had declined, and asking me if I could take it. I replied, "Yes." Till then my own future had been blind; it had only been clear that there was a work to be done for the ex-slaves and where and how it should be done.

A day-dream of the Hampton School, nearly as it is, had come to me during the war a few times; once in camp during the siege of Richmond, and once one beautiful even-



ing on the Gulf of Mexico, while on the wheel house of the transport steamship "Illinois," enroute for Texas with the 25th Army Corps (Negro) for frontier duty on the Rio Grande river, whither it had been ordered under General Sheridan, to watch and if necessary defeat Maximilian in his attempted conquest of Mexico.

The thing to be done was clear: to train selected Negro youth who should go out and teach and lead their people, first by example by getting land and homes; to give them not a dollar that they could earn for themselves; to teach respect for labor; to replace stupid drudgery with skilled hands; and, to these ends, to build up an industrial system, for the sake not only of self-support and intelligent labor, but also for the sake of character. And it seemed equally clear that the people of the country would support a wise work for the freedmen.

I think so still.

The missionary plan in Hawaii had not, I thought, considered enough the real needs and weaknesses of the people, whose ignorance alone was not half the trouble. The chief difficulty with them was deficient character, as it is with the Negro. He is what his past has made him; the true basis of work for him, and all men, is the scientific one,—one recognizing the facts of heredity and surrounding, all the facts of the case.

There was no enthusiasm for the manual labor plan. People said, "It has been tried at Oberlin and elsewhere, and given up; it won't pay."

"Of course," said I, "it cannot pay in a *money* way, but it will pay in a *moral* way, especially with the freed-men. It will make them men and women as nothing else will. It is the only way to make them good Christians."

The school has had, from the first, the good fortune of liberal-minded Trustees. They accepted its unformulated, practical plan, when it opened in April, 1868 with two teachers and fifteen pupils, and adopted my formal report of 1870,\* the year of its incorporation under a special Act of the Assembly of Virginia. By this Act of Incorporation, the School became independent of any association or sect, and of the government. It does work for the state and general government, for which it receives aid, but is not controlled or supported by them.

From the first, it has been true to the idea of education by self-help, and I hope it will remain so. Nothing is asked for the student that he can provide by his own labor; but the system that gives him this chance is costly. The student gets nothing but an opportunity to work his way. While the work-shops must be made to pay as far as possible, instruction is as important as production.

The Slater Fund has been a great stimulus to technical training. The Negro girl has proved a great success as a teacher. The women of the race deserve as good a chance as the men. So far, it has been impossible to supply the demand for Negro teachers. School houses and salaries, such as they are, are ready; but com-

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\*Reprinted in my Report of 1889 go.

petent teachers are the great and pressing need, and there is no better work for the country than to supply them. But the short public school sessions, of from three to seven months, do not give full support, and skilled labor is the only resource of many teachers for over half the year. As farmers and mechanics, they are nearly as useful as in the school room. Hence, the importance of industrial training.

Hampton's thousand graduates, (discounting ten per cent as disappointing) with half that number of under-graduates, are a working force for Negro and Indian civilization.

It was not in the original plan of the School that any but Negroes should be received, though the liberal state charter made no limit as to color; but when, in April 1878, a "Macedonian cry" came from some Indian ex-prisoners of war in Florida—once the worst of savages—through Capt. R. H. Pratt, seventeen were accepted at private expense.

It was in 1875, at the close of a war with some of the wild tribes of the Indian Territory—Kiowas, Comanches, Cheyennes and Arapahoes—which ended, as usual, in starvation and surrender, that seventy-five of the principal chiefs and their boldest followers were selected by the government to be made an example of. They were separated from their friends—some bound hand and foot with manacles and chains—loaded into wagons, and driven off, they knew not whither. On the railroad, all the long way to St. Augustine, Florida, they rode in grim expect-



tancy, chanting their songs, making their hearts strong for their fate, and trying to anticipate it. One jumped from the moving train and was shot dead by the guard. Another attempted to commit suicide, stabbing himself five times with a penknife, and others would have followed their chief's example if they had not been closely watched. At last the massive gates of old Fort Marion opened and closed upon them. They believed it to be their tomb.

The officer in charge of this wild crew was Capt. R. H. Pratt, U. S. A. He had assisted in their pursuit, was in charge of them while held as prisoners at Fort Sill during the winter, and had had long experience on the frontier. But, besides being a soldier, with no sort of sentimentalism—either Eastern or Western—about him, he was a man with a heart, with faith in God and humanity. As soon as new conditions made chains unnecessary he took them off. They found that attempts at mutiny did not escape his eye or hand. They learned that they had a master, but also a friend. He put them upon their honor. Their honor!

He believed also in the "gospel of work," of constant occupation and disciplined activity. From morning to night these caged warriors found their restless vitality fully employed. The stony courts of Fort Marion do not afford much opportunity for agricultural experiments. He had to look up other work for them. A church was to be moved in St. Augustine. He offered the free services of his strong men. With some trepidation they were accepted.

Delighted to stand outside of prison walls once more, proud to be treated as free men, they worked with a will. It was not a chain gang. From that day, Capt. Pratt's Indians were in demand in St. Augustine.

He believed in education also—even for Indians. He wrote the alphabet on the wall and gave pencils and paper and required them to copy and then pronounce the letters. Gentle ladies of St. Augustine—from North and South—gladly came, day after day, to teach them. Many others came to witness the transformation scene going on for three years in that historic old Fortress. Real, live Indians—braves and warriors—clothed in United States uniform, going through military evolutions, laboring diligently and patiently, reading and writing and speaking in English, actually praying to the Christian's God, actually trusted to guard their own prison house!

The three years passed; the prison doors were opened. There they stand straight, erect, manly, with smiling, earnest faces, and hopeful, onlooking eyes. It is an object lesson for the world.

To have been the man chosen by God to do just this work, and to have done it, would have been enough to make a man happy and entitle him to honor the rest of his days. But Capt. Pratt did not rest from his labors. He urged the young braves to stay East and improve their chance to continue the education so well begun. The "honorable women" who had helped in the work, earnestly seconded his efforts. Others came foward—men and wo-

men—to contribute to the enterprise. The consent of the War Department was obtained for any to stay who chose and for whom provisions could be made by private benevolence. General Hancock went to Fort Marion and told them, on behalf of the government, that it was satisfied with their good record for three years and would now give them free return to their homes. The choice was put before them. Twenty-two of the younger men gratefully chose to stay three years longer from their homes to learn more of the white man's road. The others were mostly too old for such an undertaking, but wished the young men God-speed.

Capt. Pratt requested admission for them at Hampton, then the only school where they could receive a training in industry and self-help as well as in English. Fifteen—chiefly Kiowas and Cheyennes—were received at Hampton in April, 1878; two of the others later.

All the prisoners were brought here first, on their way to Washington, landing at midnight on the shores of freedom. No one who witnessed that midnight raid on Hampton Institute will ever forget it. The camp was ready for the raiders with coffee and words of welcome. The next night old chief Lone Wolf told the large audience gathered to hear him, "We have started on God's road now, because God's road is the same for the red man as for the white man."

Detailed by the government to assist in the work at Hampton, Captain Pratt remained here with his Indian students.



There were not wanting prophecies that Indians would not work and would not get on with Negroes. Both predictions were disposed of when the seventeen braves fell cheerfully into line, with spade and plow and hoe, awl and hammer, side by side with their comrades of the other race. Their own idea of the relation of industry to Christianity might suggest wisdom to any missionary enterprise: Kobe wrote from Hampton, "I pray every day and hoe onions." Bear's Heart on his return home, called his people together and told them that, "The Bible goes right along with work."

A few weeks after the arrival of the Indian ex-prisoners, I called on the Hon. Carl Schurz, then Secretary of the Interior, to suggest that the so far very encouraging experiment in Indian civilization be tried more fully by bringing some younger material, girls especially. He called in Mr. E. A. Hayt, Commissioner, who stated in effect, that the education of Indian girls had been a failure, and threw cold water on the plan. I urged that there is no civilization without educated women, and begged the Secretary to let us try. He decided to do so, and gave the necessary orders and at my request sent Capt. Pratt—whom Secretary of War, Robert Lincoln, had, on my application, detailed temporarily to help us in our Hampton experiment—to Dakota whence he brought back to Hampton, in November, 1878, forty boys and nine girls, chiefly Sioux.

The Dakota party reached Hampton in November, 1878; a wild looking set, most of them in full Indian cos-

tume of blanket, leggings and moccasins, with dishevelled locks hanging way to their knees or braided with strips of red flannel down each side of their faces, yet with an expression of intelligent and earnest desire to learn what they called the white man's way.

President Hayes called attention to the new enterprise in his December message to Congress, saying: "I agree with the Secretary of the Interior that the result of this interesting experiment, if favorable, may be destined to become an important factor in the advancement of civilization among the Indians."

The confirmation of this impression was attested by the opening of the Indian school at Carlisle in October, 1879, and by appropriations for a still further extension of the government's Indian work, and was thus acknowledged in the President's next message: "The experiment of sending a number of Indian children of both sexes to the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute in Virginia, to receive an elementary English education and practical instruction in farming and other useful industries, has led to results so promising that it was thought expedient to turn over the cavalry barracks at Carlisle in Pennsylvania to the Interior Department, for the establishment of an Indian school on a larger scale. This school has now 158 pupils selected from the various tribes and is in full operation. Arrangements are also being made for the education of a number of Indian boys and girls belonging to tribes on the Pacific slope, in similar manner, at Forest Grove, Oregon. These institutions will commend them-

selves to the liberality of Congress and to the philanthropic munificence of the American people."

Similar acknowledgment was handsomely made by Capt. Pratt's Carlisle paper of Sept. '70, then called "*Eadle Keatah Toh*," *Morning Star*, as follows:

"We can never forget that when a little party of young men with red skins, who had been sick and in prison, condemned and hated by the masses, were seeking the light and the way to become men, the walls of Hampton Institute were opened to them; that there they were taken by the hand and led foward to accomplish their hopes; that there they were treated and trained as men and brothers. Hampton had the courage to do this, and from this has grown Hampton's and Carlisle's Indian work."

How the work has grown since then! From the government's purpose for the two or three "experiment stations" to the present Commissioner's wise comprehensive plans for the education of all Indian children—and above all the growth of public sentiment, at once their result and dependence—all this is a matter of history.

The old homesickness of Indians at Eastern schools is over. The three years' period at school, which was formerly too much like a prison term, is more and more ignored and the idea of fitting for life, whatever time it takes, gains strength. Indians are no longer coaxed to come. Twice as many as we can take wish to come; yet the really desirable ones are not very many, and we



do not care to increase our numbers. Our Indian work is illustrative rather than exhaustive.

We have been fortunate in our neighbors, who from the first have been most friendly.

The wide awake town of Hampton, with an enterprising white community, has a Negro population of about three thousand, and illustrates as well as any place in the South, the formation of two classes among the freedmen, the progressive and non-progressive.

For miles around, the country is dotted with their hard earned homesteads; yet the "shiftless" class is large. There is little race friction and steady improvement.

Full of resources, this famous peninsula, comparatively dormant for two hundred and fifty years, is awakening to a wonderful development, especially along its magnificent harbor front on Hampton Roads and James River. From historic Yorktown, Old Point Comfort, Newport News, and up to Jamestown Island, where stands the oldest ruin of English civilization on this continent, have already sprung large commercial, national and educational enterprises and institutions. Thousands flock to these shores, winter and summer, for rest and recreation. The growth has only begun.

This new life and energy but typifies the awakening of the whole South under the idea which won in the war. The "Boys in Blue" did a fearful but necessary work of destruction. "It is for us to finish the work which they so nobly began," said Lincoln at Gettysburg.

The duty of the hour is construction; to build up.

With all credit to the pluck and heroic self-help of the Southern people, and to Northern enterprise for railroad, mineral and other commercial development, the great constructive force in the South and everywhere is the Christian teacher. "*In hoc signo vinces*," is as true now as in the days of Constantine. Let us make the teachers and we will make the people.

The Hampton Institute should be pushed steadily, not to larger but to better, more thorough, effort, and placed on a solid foundation. It is big enough but its work is only begun. Its work, with that of other like schools, is on the line of Providential purpose in ending the great struggle as it did; the redemption of both races from the evils of slavery, which, while to the Negro educative up to a certain point, was a curse to the country.

God said, "Let my people go," and it had to be done.





